

An Unhappy and Utterly Pitiable Creature? Life and Self-Images of Deaf People in the Netherlands at the Time of the Founding Fathers of Deaf Education

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This article describes how young deaf people in the Netherlands between 1809 and 1828 made the transition from living in a school for the Deaf,¹ a rather protected community with mostly deaf people and with hearing people who could understand them rather well, to a life in hearing society with mostly hearing people who knew little about deafness. How did they manage to live in that hearing society? The article describes how these deaf people viewed themselves as Deaf persons in a hearing society. The description is based on an analysis of 73 letters written by 35 ex-pupils to the founder of their school, Reverend H. D. Guyot. As it turns out, these deaf ex-pupils managed to live in hearing society remarkably well.

An Unhappy and Utterly Pitiable Creature?²

School is immensely important in the lives of deaf children. For the 90–95% of deaf children born to hearing parents who usually are not acquainted with deafness at the time the child is born, a school for the Deaf is not only the place to learn to read, write, and do arithmetic but also the place to acquire language. If these children do not go to school, they will not only be illiterate but also “dumb” in the old-fashioned meaning of that word—they would have no or very little means of communication. For the small group of deaf children with deaf parents, school is a place where they can learn spoken language—the language of the majority in society—and where they can be Deaf

among other Deaf children. When these deaf-hearing and deaf-deaf children leave school, it is probably is a larger step than leaving school is for hearing children. It means leaving a familiar community of Deaf peers and starting to take part—now for real—in a society in which the majority of people are hearing. It means finding a job, finding a partner, coping with all the problems a minority encounters in society at large. Moreover, this society is very aural and, as yet, visual languages have but a small place in it. All of this is not only a contemporary phenomenon; it must have been so in the past as well.

There is little or no knowledge about how deaf youngsters in the past experienced their entry into society and how they managed to live and work in society. It was very fortunate to find in the archives of the oldest institute for the Deaf in the Netherlands, the Institute H. D. Guyot, 71 letters written by 33 ex-pupils to the founder of the school between 1809 and 1828. Two additional letters were found that were written by two pupils in the year before they graduated from Guyot Institute, 1828. Guyot, a Dutch Protestant clergyman, died in 1828, and these two letters are of condolence, in which the authors express their feelings with respect to Guyot and the education received.

The letters are all the more interesting because they are written in the early days of deaf education, when some famous first educators of the deaf lived: Sicard, Massieu, LeClerc, and Bebian. They were 67,

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37, 24, and 20 years old, respectively, in 1809. Berthier, another famous figure in the history of deaf education, was only 6 then, but in 1828, the year of the last letter, he was 25. As we will see, one of the authors, Eelke Jelles Eelkema, refers to all these famous men and knew several of them.

We used the 71 letters to discern first how these young deaf people made the transition from living in a rather protected community with mostly deaf people and with hearing people who could understand them rather well to a life in hearing society with mostly hearing people who knew little about deafness. How did they manage to live in that hearing society? We also tried to discover how the authors viewed themselves as deaf persons in a hearing society. We incorporated the two additional letters from authors who were still in school into our analyses because their education was nearly finished and because they write about their education.

To analyze the letters, we used the method of grounded theory analysis as described by Strauss and Corbin (1997). Grounded theory analysis contains three steps of coding and is used mainly in qualitative empirical research for analyzing interviews, but it is also very useful for “filtering out” the different actions that are performed in written texts. This is done by dividing texts into fragments, each of which receives a code. The codes refer to the topic with which the particular fragment deals. Our analysis yielded the following four main actions found in the letters: (a) description of the personal situation of the author of the letter, (b) evaluative statements about the education received at the Guyot school, (c) exchange of news, and (d) expression of emotions and requests for help. For answering the question of how deaf ex-pupils managed to live in hearing society, we used mainly the fragments that describe the personal situation of the authors but also some of the fragments in which emotions are expressed and help is requested, and the fragments in which news is exchanged. The latter fragments give a picture of the social lives of the authors. For answering our second research question about the self-images of the authors, we used the fragments in which emotions were expressed, some of the evaluative statements that accompanied the descriptions of personal situations, and the evaluative statements about the education they received. Their education

must have given them a sense of belonging to a group, that is, a group of Deaf persons, but it also gave them the tools for living in hearing society.

We start with a brief description of the political and educational situation in the Netherlands from the time Guyot started his school until his death, when the last letter was written. Special attention is paid to how at the Guyot Institute deaf people were educated and how they were viewed in those days. Thus, we give the letters and their authors their proper place in deaf education and in Dutch history. Sources for this short history are, among others, several books that were also found in the archives in Groningen. We then describe the content of the letters according to the four actions mentioned above and try to answer our research questions.

Some Historical Facts and Figures

The year Guyot started to teach deaf children and the first decades after that were turbulent periods in Dutch history. From 1795 to 1806 in more or less the region that is now the Netherlands, there was the so-called Bataafse Republiek (Bataaf Republic). Patriots who took over power from the old regent aristocracy after an invasion by a French army established this republic. Although in fact the Netherlands became a satellite state of France, this was the beginning of what later would become the Dutch unitary state. In 1806, the republic became a monarchy with emperor Napoleon's brother, Lodewijk Napoleon, as king. In 1810, Napoleon sent Lodewijk to Austria, and the Netherlands became a province of France. Napoleon was defeated in 1813 and had to give up the Netherlands. William I (1772–1843) became king of what was once more a monarchy and would remain so.

Until 1806, there was no national legislation with respect to education and schooling in the Netherlands. In 1806, national legislation was passed in which a distinction was made between public schools and two types of private schools and in which rather strict requirements applied to teachers at different levels of competence. This law, apart from some minor revisions, remained operative until 1857 (Knippenberg, 1986). Around 1800, general literacy in the Netherlands was relatively high, compared with that in other European countries, namely, 75% of men and 60%

of women could read and write at least sufficiently to write their names in a register of intended marriages. Knippenberg (1986), who presents these figures, attributes this relatively high literacy level to Protestantism, which was the leading religion in the country (in general, Protestant, developed, northern European countries had a higher level of literacy than did Catholic, less developed, southern European countries) and to the Dutch focus on shipping, trade, and commercial farming instead of industry. The former two sectors require more literacy than does the latter.

In 1790, minister H. D. Guyot started teaching deaf children in Groningen, a city in the far North of the Netherlands (Betten, 1984). During his visit to Paris in 1784, by coincidence he saw a demonstration performed by deaf pupils of Abbé Michel de l'Épée. Guyot was very impressed by the results of Épée's teaching and became a trainee in service of Épée, studying his method in which sign communication played a prominent part. Back in the Netherlands, Guyot started to teach a small group of deaf pupils, and on April 14, 1790, he founded the first³ school for the deaf in the Netherlands. Boys and girls attending the school until 1809 lived in boarding houses in the neighborhood of the school. In 1809, the school building was ready, as were two boarding houses on the premises, one for boys and one for girls. Feith,⁴ in his address at the 50th anniversary of the Guyot Institute (Feith, 1841), provides important data about the number of students, their backgrounds, and so forth.

There were 14 pupils when the school started; in 1828 there were 160; and in 1840 there were 674. Feith estimates that in the Netherlands in 1840 there were 818 deaf people, which would imply that in that year, 82% of the deaf population was between 10 and 20 years old and went to Guyot Institute. This seems somewhat unlikely. Feith also mentions the number of deaf inhabitants found by a type of census performed in 1830 that showed 3,900 deaf in a population of 6 million people (1 in 1,539). This is a number that Feith did not want to believe because he knew of inaccuracies in the counting methods. He thought it too large, although it still implies that a considerable amount of the deaf youngsters went to Guyot Institute. The number of staff members increased from 2 in 1790 to

16 in 1820 (no figures are available for 1828 or beyond). Pupils came from all parts of the Netherlands, and although most pupils were Protestant, as was Guyot, pupils from other religions were also welcome. In the first 25 years of the Institute (between 1790 and 1815), of the 144 pupils who started and finished their education there (12 died or were dismissed), 103 were Protestant, 25 were Catholic, and 16 were from other religions, including Jewish. Pupils came from all sorts of backgrounds. If their parents could not pay the tuition for the school and the money for food and clothing, the Guyot Institute paid part of it or even the total sum. For the same 144 pupils, in 27 cases, parents paid everything; in 96 cases, the Institute paid everything; in the remaining 21 cases, parents and the Institute each paid a part. It is interesting to note that sometimes pupils were dismissed because they turned out not to be deaf. Brugmans (1896) maintains that once in awhile, people sent their hearing children to the Guyot Institute (instructing them to "act deaf") because the education there was outstanding, compared with education of hearing children in those days. Pupils usually began their education at Guyot Institute when they were 10–12 years old and stayed some 8–10 years at the school (all these figures are from records with pupils' names found in the Guyot archives and from Feith, 1841).

From the start of the school, every Wednesday morning the pupils showed what they had learned to those who financially supported the school. There was an annual public exam for the pupils, followed one day later by the annual general meeting of the board of directors. Guyot's sons, Charles and Rembt (Guyot & Guyot, 1825), describe daily life at the Institute as one of hard work alternating with few pleasant activities. School days were long. There were lessons for at least 10 hours each day. In between, there was some time for play. Sundays were reserved for religious activities and for walking. During the first 2 years, pupils stayed at the Institute all year. From the third year onward, pupils could go home for 1 month, provided that their progress in school was satisfactory. In addition to reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, (biblical) history, and gymnastics, pupils were taught different arts and crafts. For the latter, they also served apprenticeships with craftsmen in the city of Groningen.

How the Deaf Were Viewed by Their Educators

What do we know about how the deaf authors and their fellow pupils were viewed by their hearing benefactors in the days the letters were written? Not very much. We can rely here on few sources, namely, some written material of these benefactors. As mentioned above, Guyot was inspired by de l'Epeé. De l'Epeé said, "The deaf-and-dumb are somewhat like animals as long as we do not make an effort to release them from the dense darkness in which they are plunged"⁵ (Roorda, 1910). Sicard,⁶ de l'Epeé's successor, said that "before he has had the advantage of education, the deaf-and-dumb is but some sort of walking machine, the construction of which is inferior to that of animals" (Roorda, 1910, p. 6).

Rembt Tobie Guyot, Guyot's son and director of the Guyot Institute from 1854 to 1861, wrote a dissertation in 1824 about legal rights for the *surdo-mutorum*, the deaf and dumb, describing these rights from antiquity until the time the dissertation was published. In one chapter, he elaborates on the nature of the deaf and dumb. He considers them to be not entirely accountable because of mental deficits. They look like human beings, and they imitate human beings rather well. However, they essentially stand somewhere in the middle between animals and human beings, though closer to animals. They are not really part of society and even can be dangerous for society. Rembt Guyot (1824) attributes to the deaf and dumb certain traits they all have in common, such as a burning curiosity and an unbridled hot temper. He supports this thesis with quotes from experts, such as

When the Deaf are being raised and educated right from childhood, with finger speech,⁷ many if not all of these shortcomings will be undone. For finger speech is the natural language for these creatures and it is the way to gain access to their 'sleeping mind'. (pp. 22–23)

Another source is the earlier mentioned address of Feith (1841). Part of his speech is a description of the deaf-and-dumb "as his listeners have known them when they were a child." These listeners must have been rather old, because Feith describes the deaf and dumb before they got any education, that is, before the Guyot Institute existed. The deaf-and-dumb person then

... tramped about through the streets and the villages, begging, as a half-lunatic, with a bell in his hand, in order to get what little money he needed to buy a minimum of food. An outcast, jeered at everywhere, a burden to his family and relatives, insensitive to the beautiful nature surrounding him, ignorant of Him who created it, he wandered about in dark and limited thoughts. (p. vi)

In 1896, J. G. Brugmans⁸ wrote a retrospective of the first hundred years of the Institute. He cited minister Guyot who, at the founding of the Institute, spoke about

... the principle of a harmonious upbringing of the deaf-and-dumb person. One should not for one moment lose sight of the pupils, the entire day should be one, large practice for them: their school hours, their leisure time, their walks, their labour time. (Brugmans, 1896, p. 50)

The teachers had to work hard, and when they complained about the little results for so much work, Guyot told them, "It is not the imperviousness of the deaf-an-dumb but your lack of insight, your inability to influence his soul which makes that you do not achieve what you want to achieve" (Brugmans, 1896, p. 59).

At first glance, these descriptions are very similar, sketching a very negative picture of the deaf creature before he gets any education and a rather positive picture of the deaf creature after he has been educated. At a closer look, however, some differences can be noticed. In some of these quotes, deaf people are sketched as beings who are not entirely human and who belong to the animal realm until their educators come to rescue and raise them to some form of humankind by bringing them some form of language and education. In other quotes, notably this last one from Guyot himself, a more positive picture of deaf people can be seen. Now the deaf person is someone who has a human soul that merely is difficult to contact. The rather paternalistic attitude of these educators toward their pupils does not end when they leave school, as we will demonstrate. Guyot himself, at least, remained a fatherlike figure in the lives of the authors of the letters.

Table 1 Numbers of graduates in the years the letter authors graduated

Year	No. graduates	No. authors from whom letters have been retrieved
1799	1	1
1802	8	3
1807	4	2
1808	4	2
1809	3	1
1811	7	2
1813	7	3
1814	7	3
1816	2	10
1817	4	2
1821	0	3
1822	1	1
1828	0	2

The Letters and Their Contents

Of course, these 73 letters are the letters that are still in the archive. We don't know whether there were more that were not preserved. This makes it impossible to determine how many of the yearly graduates kept in touch with the Guyot Institute. Thanks to very detailed recording of pupils' data in those days, however, we have for every author the number of pupils who graduated in the same year that he or she graduated (Table 1). As we see, a quarter to half of the graduates for nearly every year from 1807 to 1821 wrote at least one letter to Guyot.

Of the 73 letters, 6 are written in French (5 of them by one author), which in those days was taught in the school for the deaf in Groningen together with Dutch because the Netherlands were occupied by the French. The letters are written by 27 men and 8 women. Table 2 presents some more information about the amount of letters written by each author and when they were written.

In the timing of the letters, we see mixed patterns. Whereas some authors wrote only just after leaving the Guyot Institute, others occasionally sent letters over a rather long period. Some authors started writing shortly after leaving school; others wrote their first letters after having been out of school for several years. The authors came from various backgrounds and had various occupations, as we can see in Table 3.

It is remarkable that the letters written by men usually contain few language errors. The language used

Table 2 Number of letters and when written

Letters	Authors	
1	15	
2	14	
3	1	
5	3	
6	2	
Period of years*	Authors	Letters per author
1	3	2
2	4	2
3	6	2 × 5, 5 × 1
5	2	2 × 1, 5 × 1
6	2	2 × 1, 3 × 1
10	1	5
11	1	6
13	1	6
Years after graduation before first letter	Authors	
0–2	17	
3–5	10	
6–8	4	
9–11	2	
12	1	
16	1	

*If more than 1 letter.

is relatively complex, and the letters are rather long. By contrast, the letters written by women are shorter and contain more language errors.

The letters show that Guyot answered at least some of the letters in writing. It seems that Guyot in his letters expresses his opinion about how the addressed ought to live and about other matters concerning the addressed. He also asks the addressed to deliver messages to other deaf ex-pupils and to do all sorts of errands.

Content of the Letters

Description of the Personal Situations of the Authors of the Letters

Authors tell where they live and with whom. Some live on their own, others with family or in foster homes. Because most letters were written shortly after leaving school, it is not very surprising that most ex-pupils were not yet living on their own.

Experiences with living at home differ. One man who has a deaf brother writes,⁹ "Now we are with our

Table 3 Background and occupations of authors

Financial position of parents and number of authors													
Affluent	Fairly well off	Fairly poor	Poor relief	Unknown									
2	13	14	5	1									

Occupation of the authors' fathers and number of authors													
mayor	salesman	clergyman	barge- man	carpenter	office clerk	major general	soldier	master smith	organist	carpenter apprentice	servant in factory	unknown	
2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21

Occupations of authors and number of authors													
sewing	saddler	cartwright cooper	cabinet- maker	copper- smith	sail maker	chair maker	artist	shoe- maker	type- setter	weaver	cobbler	unknown	
9	1	1	8	1	1	1	6	1	2	1	2	1	1

parents and we really like that, we all live together in much peace.” Another author writes that he got “much evil” from his father because his father is “totally bad and drank very much.” He writes that his father has been in prison for three days, and he himself has been very patient and calm, bearing all this misery while being totally innocent. Fortunately, help did come along: “Father is quiet now since the mayor has put a lot of pressure on father.”

Those who have sweethearts all mention that their partners are hearing and that they can communicate well with these hearing partners. They say that they can speech-read their partners well and that they teach finger speech to hearing partners, to hearing family members, and to hearing friends.

Almost all authors mention their circumstances at work and their different occupations. Some of them have jobs with family or parents; few have independent professions; and most of them work for someone else (see Table 3). All women are needlewomen. It is clear that sometimes the authors have financial difficulties, especially during the time of the French invasion, when there was a shortage of jobs. The artists, in particular, have a hard time. One of them says, “I always worry for not having work and, thus, earning no money.”

Aside from all the hard work to earn a living, there is still some time for leisure. Most of this time seems to be filled with religious activities, such as going to church, visiting clergymen, and reading bible stories and other religious literature. One author mentions reading texts written by Guyot about how to lead a good life. Of

course, authors spend time with family, friends, and former fellow pupils. In the context of this, the authors tell about how they are treated in hearing society. No one mentions downright rejection or very nasty experiences. Many mention that other people are interested in them and in the education they have had at the school for the Deaf. With respect to their position in society, the authors say in varying ways that they are happy about being able to go about with other people and be useful members of society. In various letters, the authors mention the importance of good communication. They say, for instance, “Now, I am fairly well able to speak and write with people. But speech reading is difficult for me.” Beyond this one quotation, communication by speech is rarely mentioned. Many letters mention communication by means of writing on slates the authors carry with them all the time or by means of finger speech.

Evaluative Statements About the Education Received

The authors attach great value to the education they received at the Guyot Institute, especially to Guyot's efforts, often in his own words. One of them speaks about “the ongoing dedication with which he brought us from the dark into the Light.” They express the opinion that without education they would have remained in some sort of animal condition. “[Minister Guyot cared] for us deaf-and-dumb who were the subject of animal ignorance and would have remained so forever. . . . He brought us unfortunate objects to civilization and formed us to

useful members of society.” They also value highly the professions they have learned in the school: “I owe it to you that I have learned my profession. What a privilege it is to support myself.” Relief is felt because one has a job and, thus, is able to support oneself instead of being dependent on charity: “I owe it to you [the director/the school] that I learned my craft. What a great privilege, to be able to support myself!”

One praises and thanks minister Guyot:

Right now I am fulfilled with happiness that I can read and write. This shows to me that I am not stupid. I think by my self that you have brought me this. For you have developed my powers of reason, you have given me religious knowledge and other necessary knowledge so that I am now a useful member of society.

Many of the authors express the opinion that the school should expand and teach more deaf children. They advertise minister Guyot and his school by giving lectures and organizing information meetings about the school. They press parents to send their deaf children to the school. They demonstrate finger speech and patiently answer all kinds of questions people have about the school and its education. Each of the authors does so in his or her milieu. One speaks about his contacts with the Count of Gelderland, a province of the Netherlands, another about his contacts with the baker.

Although they express their happiness and satisfaction about the schooling they have had, many authors end their letters with excuses for possible spelling and style errors. Two of the authors end letters with their names, then “deaf and dumb.” Some authors try to go on with their education and ask the clergymen in their neighborhoods to give them extra lessons. They communicate in these lessons by speech reading or, if that is not sufficient, by writing.

Exchange of News

News is exchanged, particularly about important public events, such as the French invasion and the festive entry of William I in Amsterdam. One of the authors was present at this birth of the Dutch monarchy. Smaller yet important public events are also mentioned, such as the murder of a servant. Best

wishes are exchanged; bits of news are told about parents, other family members, friends, acquaintances, and former fellow pupils. These bits of news vary from the birth and baptism of a son to the confession of lovemaking to a girl whom the author hopes to marry.

Sometimes on request of Guyot, the author visits a friend or a notable in order to “send the minister’s compliments.” Also on request of Guyot, goods are ordered, made, or sent. One woman writes how a letter of Guyot gave her a fright. She says that she did not at all sell her schoolbooks and that she has been accused falsely by other deaf people in her residence. One author alerts minister Guyot that a former pupil is abused by her aunt, has barely any clothes, has to sleep on straw, gets little food, and is regularly turned out into the street. The letter writer asks the minister to do something, knowing that “aunt is very frightened” of Guyot and that Guyot “is estimated highly by the noble gents here.” A former pupil who is a notary’s clerk tells that he went to tea with an affluent gentleman. This man had brought a black deaf woman slave from New York, and the clerk and the slave could understand each other well.

The aforementioned Eelkema, who won a grant for study in Paris and worked as an artist there, wrote a letter in Dutch to Guyot’s widow to offer his condolences. His five other letters were written in French. He tells about his journeys to Italy, Switzerland, and England; about his visits to deaf schools there; about the methods used in these schools; and about his contacts with famous persons in the history of the Deaf: Sicard, Massieu,¹⁰ LeClerc,¹¹ Bebian,¹² and Berthier.¹³ Eelkema mentions LeClerc’s departure for America with Gallaudet, and LeClerc’s marriage to a deaf woman in America, about which Eelkema was told when he was in London. Eelkema apparently functioned as a messenger between Sicard and Guyot about methods of education and later as a messenger between Bebian and Guyot. Eelkema’s observation that the relationship between Sicard and Guyot was flagging is interesting because Guyot began to have more exchanges with Bebian.

Expression of Emotion and Requests for Help

All kinds of emotion are expressed in the letters. There is fear of wild gangs who operated around 1813 when

Napoleon's troops went on the rampage and fear of these troops, of the political turmoil, and of not having a job. There is also fear of being viewed as a "bad" person or becoming a bad person. Regularly, authors state that they are good or try to be good. Sadness is mentioned, especially for having had to leave the school for the deaf. Nostalgia for Groningen (the city where the school has its seat), the school, and the family Guyot is expressed regularly. Often an author utters the hope to be able to visit Groningen once more.

Authors also write about how they feel about themselves. One says he is sorry to have such a slow mind. Another says he is sorry he had a "blunt" mind when he was in school and therefore minister Guyot had to take much pains so that he learn the necessary things, "while at this moment I clearly see what I owe to you." Many former pupils feel a duty to answer Guyot's letters and a duty to express their thanks toward him. They express the wish that minister Guyot may live very long and thus will be able to teach many more deaf pupils. If Guyot were to die, the authors wish that he might receive a heavenly reward for all his good works: "Live long for my unhappy brothers and sisters and I will always acknowledge you in love." Many authors say the same in somewhat different wordings. When Guyot dies, one talks about "the great indebtedness I feel towards him, just like many of my unhappy fellow-sufferers, for his major benefactions." Another expresses his gratitude and his indebtedness by writing, "For do I not owe my education, my training, and my happiness, next to the ever-ruling God, to you!" Still another indicates that his gratitude will be lifelong: "After a range of time that you, my dear father and teacher, are absent, my soul will never forget you, forever I will praise you and your holy family in my prayers."

Expressions of emotions sometimes go hand in hand with requests for help. Sometimes an author simply asks for information about something. More often they ask for advice. For instance, one author inherited a large sum of money and asks minister Guyot how he can best invest this money. Would it be wise to lend it to someone at interest? Someone else asks whether it is wise to take a job at a particular company because someone has told him that some of the employees there are rather wicked. Some of the authors ask minister Guyot for help in finding a job.

One author asks for a job at the Guyot school, and he gets it in 1814, thus becoming the first deaf teacher in the Netherlands. One author asks for financial help. He is an artist in an awkward position because but few of his paintings are being sold. Let us now see what the letters tell us about how these deaf ex-pupils managed to live in hearing society.

How Did the Authors Manage to Live in Hearing Society and How Did They View Themselves?

The letters show that their deaf authors manage to survive in hearing society remarkably well. They all have jobs and support themselves. They have contacts with both deaf and hearing persons. The deaf persons they have contact with mainly seem to be fellow ex-pupils of Guyot. When they have partners, they are hearing partners. Apparently, they seem not to have gained deaf partners at school. That none of them has a deaf partner is rather striking. Perhaps at the Guyot Institute the pupils were told that it was better to marry a hearing person. Such advice would fit with the view of the educators that the deaf essentially are poor souls and barely human. Further study of the material in the archives of the Institute perhaps will shed light on this.

The authors all have busy social lives and do not seem to experience discrimination, although communication with the hearing is not always easy. They view themselves as useful members of society, and this seems to be very important for them. They are proud not to be a burden to society. These authors look back at their education with great gratitude, satisfaction, and nostalgia. School time is pictured almost as a lost paradise and Guyot as some sort of moral hero and father. They do not forget their teacher, and as time goes by, he seems to become more and more heroic. In contrast with how highly Guyot is estimated, many authors render themselves as humble and miserable beings. They have come out of darkness into the light, as one of them states. They obviously do not see education as a self-evident right for deaf children, as we view it now. They see education as something that benevolently was donated to them and feel the need for excusing that they still make language errors in their letters to their great benefactor.

Perhaps the combination of highly estimating Guyot and picturing themselves as poor souls is not strange. We have seen that their educators viewed the deaf as poor souls, and it is plausible that they transferred this image to their students. The more “pitiable” the deaf are in their original state of being, the greater the achievement of their educators, especially with respect to such successful deaf school students as the authors of these letters. The fact alone that they can write letters without many language errors—two authors even in French—would not be too bad an educational achievement even today, when much more expertise and experience exists with respect to deaf children and deaf education, and when the material conditions in education are much better. The former pupils also wish such a successful education for the deaf who are at school age and who are pitiable as they themselves once have been. Therefore, they feel the need to advertise the school and to spread the fame of minister Guyot as his true disciples.

The letters give an interesting picture of the relationship between the ex-pupils and their former schoolmaster. Clearly, minister Guyot plays an important part in the lives of the ex-pupils. Everything that happens in their lives is told to him. Guyot and his ex-pupils seem to have father-child relationships or at least more of a family relationship than a relationship between teacher and ex-pupil. “In my heart I love you more than my own father,” writes one ex-pupil. In daily life, one keeps Guyot’s wise lessons in mind: “In the evening I have read a lot of your fatherly lessons.” The family type relationship is illustrated also by a mention in one of the letters that one of Guyot’s children was in the vicinity and went to tea with the author and sends his greetings to his father, Guyot.

There clearly seems to have been a network of ex-pupils and minister Guyot. Guyot offers his support, his advice, and sometimes even concrete help. The ex-pupils in return answer to requests by Guyot for doing errands or sending goods. This network sometimes is rather coercive. We mentioned earlier that one ex-pupil reported to Guyot that another ex-pupil sold her school-books, which apparently is seen as a sign of disrespect for her former education. This ex-pupil herself vehemently denies the accusation. However, the network also has many positive sides. One author requests the help of

Guyot for a fellow ex-pupil who is treated badly by her aunt; apparently, Guyot has instilled awe in this aunt.

Of course, it is possible that these 73 letters reflect the situation and the views of only the “happy few.” Less successful and/or less literate ex-pupils perhaps did not want or were not able to write letters. As we have seen in Table 1, however, the authors represent a quarter to half of the deaf graduates in their years of graduation. Further research into the archives of the Guyot Institute and of the other institutes in the Netherlands must shed light on this and other intriguing questions we still have with respect to Dutch deaf education in the early days.

Notes

1. Because we consider Deaf people to belong to a minority group with its own language and culture, in those cases we will capitalize the word *deaf*. When we explicitly refer to physical deafness only, we will use lowercase.

2. This is how the Deaf are described in a short novel written in 1852 (Uhl, 1852).

3. The second was the Catholic Institute for the Deaf in St. Michielsgestel, a village in the South of the Netherlands. This second school was founded in 1840. However, in 1828 a priest, Van Beek, had already started to teach a small group of Catholic deaf children there.

4. Hendrik Octavius Feith, born in 1778, son to the famous Dutch poet Rhijnvis Feith, had a doctorate in law. He was Chair of the board of directors of the Guyot Institute for 21 years. He died in 1849 (oral communication with Henk Betten, archivist at the contemporary Guyot Institute, June 8, 2004).

5. According to the fifth director of the Guyot Institute, P. Roorda, who quotes de l’Épée in his book (Roorda, 1910).

6. Hearing, born in 1742, Sicard was the successor of de L’Épée, appointed by the archbishop of Bordeaux. He was imprisoned in 1792 during the French Revolution and nearly died. Thereupon, he lived underground for 2 years and in those years wrote a massive dictionary of sign language. He died in 1822.

7. *Finger speech* was the name for the combination of signs and hand alphabet.

8. Headmaster and later acting director of the Guyot Institute from 1864 to 1902.

9. The Dutch quotes, which of course are written in Dutch, are here translated into contemporary English.

10. Massieu lived from 1772 to 1846. He was the first deaf person known to have taught in de L’Épée’s school. He taught de L’Épée signs. Some of Massieu’s pupils later founded schools for the Deaf themselves and used Massieu’s teaching method.

11. LeClerc (1785–1869) was a deaf student of de L’Épée, Sicard, Massieu, and Bebian at the Institute for the Deaf in Paris, where later he became a teacher. He went to America with Gallaudet and together with him opened the first school for the Deaf in America in 1817 in Hartford, Connecticut. American

Sign Language is said to stem from the sign language that LeClerc imported to America.

12. Hearing, born at Guadeloupe in 1789, Bebian died in 1839. Sent to France by his father, he was a godson of Sicard and grew up among deaf youngsters with a thorough command of sign language and finger spelling. He became a teacher at the Institute for the Deaf in Paris but was fired in 1825 because of his critical attitude with respect to the teaching method, which became more and more oral.

13. Berthier lived from 1803 to 1886. Deaf, a gifted student, he became assistant teacher at the age of 21 and teacher at the age of 26. Later he became head teacher. In his time, he was a well-known writer. He was very interested in politics and a fighter for rights of the Deaf. Berthier wrote a "Napoleon Code" in reaction to the Civil Code of the French Empire. In his code, the Deaf had more rights, including the right of inheritance. He exchanged letters with Victor Hugo, who wrote to him, "What matters deafness of the ear, when the mind hears? The one true deafness, the incurable deafness, is that of the mind" (written communication, Victor Hugo, November 25, 1845).

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